

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 228 741

EA 015 593

AUTHOR Wright, Linus
TITLE Opinion Polls--Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?
PUB DATE 27 Feb 83
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators (Atlantic City, NJ, February 25-28, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Surveys; Elementary Secondary Education; Guidelines; Interviews; Measurement Objectives; *Measurement Techniques; *Public Opinion; Questioning Techniques; Questionnaires; Sample Size; Sampling; School Community Relationship

ABSTRACT

These tips on surveying public opinion are based on the contention that community surveys can be useful to educators who want to know what the community is thinking about education, are ready to respond, and have no qualms about making survey results public. The author first discusses the importance of determination of the community survey's precise goals, such as obtaining information for long-range planning, feedback on programs, or information on the level of school support or changes in opinion trends. He lists pros and cons of several types of surveys, such as printed, telephone, or face-to-face. He also discusses how many people should be surveyed and how they should be selected, contending that a sample of 384 people randomly selected will represent the thinking of any community. Selection and wording of questions is stressed, with admonitions to be brief and clear, and put most interesting questions first. There is a section on how interviewers (either teachers or volunteers) must be selected and prepared. Analyzing and using the results is seen as crucial and is discussed in detail. The views of identifiable segments (such as parents of private school students) must be extracted. The author concludes that surveying is worth the effort, time, and expense required, especially in planning for the future. (JM)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linus Wright

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TITLE OF YOUR CONVENTION PROGRAM Opinion Polls---Do You Know What Your
Community Thinks?

DAY YOU WILL PRESENT YOUR PROGRAM Sunday, February 27, 1983
Day of Week Date

TIME OF DAY YOU WILL PRESENT YOUR PROGRAM 3:00-4:00 p.m.

YOUR NAME Linus Wright

YOUR TITLE General Superintendent

NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT/ORGANIZATION _____

Dallas Independent School District

ADDRESS 3700 Ross Avenue
Street

Dallas, Texas 75234
City State Zip

OFFICE PHONE (214) 824-1620, ext. 200

ED228741

EA 015 593

OPINION POLLS--DO YOU KNOW WHAT

YOUR COMMUNITY THINKS?

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

3 P.M., FEBRUARY 27, 1983

MR. LINUS WRIGHT

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN MY PRESENTATION THIS AFTERNOON WITH ONE OF JAMES THURBER'S INSIGHTFUL FABLES.

SEVERAL SUMMERS AGO THERE WAS A SCOTTY WHO WENT TO THE COUNTRY FOR A VISIT. HE DECIDED THAT ALL THE FARM DOGS WERE COWARDS BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID OF A CERTAIN ANIMAL THAT HAD A WHITE STRIPE DOWN ITS BACK.

THE SCOTTY SAID TO THE FARM DOG WHO LIVED IN THE HOUSE WHERE THE SCOTTY WAS VISITING: "YOU ARE A PUSSYCAT AND I CAN LICK YOU. I CAN ALSO LICK THE LITTLE ANIMAL WITH THE WHITE STRIPE, TOO. SHOW HIM TO ME."

THE FARM DOG ASKED: "DON'T YOU WANT TO ASK ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT HIM?"

THE SCOTTY REPLIED: "NAW. JUST SHOW ME WHERE TO FIND HIM."

SO THE FARM DOG TOOK THE SCOTTY INTO THE WOODS AND SHOWED HIM THE WHITE-STRIPED ANIMAL, AND THE SCOTTY CLOSED IN ON HIM, GROWLING AND SLASHING. IT WAS ALL OVER IN A MOMENT, AND THE SCOTTY LAY ON HIS BACK.

WHEN HE CAME TO, THE FARM DOG ASKED HIM: "WHAT HAPPENED?"

THE SCOTTY SAID: "HE THREW VITRIOL. BUT HE NEVER LAID A GLOVE ON ME."

A FEW DAYS LATER THE FARM DOG TOLD THE SCOTTY THERE WAS ANOTHER ANIMAL ALL THE FARM DOGS WERE AFRAID OF.

THE SCOTTY BOASTED: "LEAD ME TO HIM. I CAN LICK ANYTHING THAT DOESN'T WEAR HORSESHOES."

THE FARM DOG ASKED: "DON'T YOU WANT TO ASK ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT HIM?"

THE SCOTTY SAID: "NAW. JUST SHOW ME WHERE HE HANGS OUT."

SO THE FARM DOG LED HIM TO A PLACE IN THE WOODS AND POINTED OUT THE LITTLE ANIMAL WHEN HE CAME ALONG.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

THE SCOTTY LOOKED AT HIM AND SAID: "A CLOWN, A PUSHOVER."
AND HE CLOSED IN, LEADING WITH HIS LEFT AND EXHIBITING SOME
MIGHTY FANCY FOOTWORK.

IN LESS THAN A SECOND THE SCOTTY WAS FLAT ON HIS BACK,
AND WHEN HE WOKE UP, THE FARM DOG WAS PULLING QUILLS OUT OF
HIM.

THE FARM DOG ASKED: "WHAT HAPPENED?"

THE SCOTTY MANAGED TO MUTTER: "HE PULLED A KNIFE ON ME,
BUT AT LEAST I HAVE LEARNED HOW YOU FIGHT OUT HERE IN THE
COUNTRY, AND NOW I AM GOING TO BEAT YOU UP."

SO HE CLOSED IN ON THE FARM DOG, HOLDING HIS NOSE WITH
ONE FRONT PAW TO WARD OFF THE VITRIOL AND COVERING HIS EYES
WITH THE OTHER FRONT PAW TO KEEP OUT THE KNIVES.

THE SCOTTY COULDN'T SEE HIS OPPONENT AND HE COULDN'T SMELL
HIS OPPONENT. HE WAS SO BADLY BEATEN THAT HE HAD TO BE TAKEN
BACK TO THE CITY AND PUT IN A NURSING HOME.

THE MORAL OF THIS STORY IS: IT IS BETTER TO ASK SOME OF
THE QUESTIONS THAN TO KNOW ALL THE ANSWERS.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

WELL, I'M HERE TODAY TO TELL YOU THAT BY ASKING THE
RIGHT QUESTIONS, WE CAN FIND THE ANSWERS TO:

- MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY
- TESTING THE WATERS FOR BOND ISSUES OR TAX LEVIES
- COMPARING OUR CITIZENS' PERCEPTIONS OF OUR SCHOOLS
WITH NATIONWIDE OPINIONS AND
- COMMUNICATING TO CITIZENS THAT WE CARE ABOUT THEIR
OPINIONS AND CONCERNS.

JUST THE FACT THAT WE CARE ENOUGH TO DO A SURVEY CAN
HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT. THINK ABOUT IT. DON'T YOU LIKE TO
BE ASKED YOUR OPINION? APPARENTLY--MORE AND MORE--MOST
PEOPLE LIKE TO BE ASKED WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT A CERTAIN ISSUE.
I THINK IT'S INTERESTING THAT A SURVEY CONDUCTED IN 1946 SHOWED
THAT 67 PERCENT HAD NO OPINION, BUT, THAT HAS CERTAINLY CHANGED.
NOW NEARLY EVERYBODY HAS AN OPINION AND IS READY AND WILLING
TO TELL YOU ABOUT IT. A CASE IN POINT IS A 1977 SURVEY WHICH
SHOWED THAT ONLY 3 PERCENT SAID THEY HAD NO OPINION.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

BUT WHILE ASKING CITIZENS' OPINIONS CAN HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT, IT ALSO CAN HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT--IF WE'RE NOT WILLING TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON WHAT OUR COMMUNITY SAYS. AND I ALSO WOULD LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT, IF WE'RE GOING TO SURVEY INDIVIDUAL CITIZENS ON WHAT THEY THINK, WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO INFORM THEM OF THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY.

ONCE YOU'VE DETERMINED:

- THAT YOU NEED TO KNOW WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY IS THINKING ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION
- THAT YOU ARE READY TO RESPOND TO WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY SAYS, AND
- THAT YOU HAVE NO QUALMS ABOUT MAKING PUBLIC THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY, THEN THERE ARE SEVERAL QUESTIONS YOU MUST DECIDE.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

1. FIRST OF ALL, WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY?
2. SECONDLY, WHICH TYPE OF SURVEY SHOULD BE USED?
3. HOW SHOULD THE PARTICIPANTS BE SELECTED?
4. HOW SHOULD THE QUESTIONNAIRE BE PREPARED?
5. HOW SHOULD THE RESULTS BE RELEASED?
6. HOW SHOULD THE SURVEY BE WRAPPED UP AND WHAT SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE RESULTS?

1. DETERMINING THE EXACT PURPOSE OF YOUR SURVEY IS CRITICAL TO ITS SUCCESS AND SHAPES EVERY OTHER DECISION YOU WILL MAKE. OF COURSE, YOU MAY HAVE SEVERAL GOALS IN MIND WHICH CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED IN ONE PACKAGE.

FOR EXAMPLE, YOU MAY WANT:

- TO PROVIDE INFORMATION FOR STAFF AND THE BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR IMMEDIATE-FUTURE OR LONG-RANGE PLANNING
- TO PROVIDE INPUT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENTS AND OTHER CITIZENS FOR PROGRAMS IN THE PLANNING STAGES, SUCH AS YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

- TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON THE PRESENT OR NEWLY-
ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS
- TO DETERMINE LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION
IN VARIOUS SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY...FOR EXAMPLE,
SENIOR CITIZENS, PARENTS, YOUNG SINGLES...IN
PREPARATION FOR A SCHOOL BOND ELECTION, POSSIBLE
VOTER REFERENDUM, ETC.
- TO ESTABLISH TRENDS IN OPINIONS ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS
THROUGH REPEATED SURVEYS WITH A CONSTANT QUESTIONNAIRE
- TO COMPARE LOCAL OPINIONS WITH NATIONAL SURVEY RESULTS
USING MANY OF THE SAME QUESTIONS
- TO INCREASE CITIZENS' AWARENESS OF THE CHALLENGES FACING
PUBLIC EDUCATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY
- TO IDENTIFY WEAKNESSES IN CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

AND, I CAN'T STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING THE COMMITMENT OF YOUR SCHOOL BOARD AND STAFF FROM THE VERY BEGINNING IN NOT ONLY DOING THE SURVEY BUT ALSO IN BEING OPEN TO THE FINDINGS AND ACTING IN GOOD FAITH ON THE INFORMATION RECEIVED.

2. A SECOND MAJOR DECISION WILL BE THE TYPE OF SURVEY TO USE. BASICALLY THERE ARE FOUR TYPES OF SURVEYS WHICH MAY BE USED.

- (1) THE PRINTED QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO CITIZENS FOR
THEM TO COMPLETE AND MAIL BACK
- (2) THE PRINTED QUESTIONNAIRE DROPPED OFF AND PICKED
UP
- (3) THE TELEPHONE SURVEY
- (4) THE FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW

THERE ARE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO ALL THREE.

(1) A RATHER OBVIOUS PROBLEM WITH THE PRINTED QUESTIONNAIRE IS GETTING THEM BACK. UNLESS THE RESPONSE IS AT LEAST TWO-THIRDS OF THE TOTAL NUMBER MAILED, THE VALIDITY OF THE SURVEY WILL BE LIMITED. CHANCES OF GETTING THEM BACK ARE REALLY LOW

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

UNLESS YOU ENCLOSE A STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE, AND, WITH THE HIGH COST OF POSTAGE, 40 CENTS A THROW CAN ADD UP IN A HURRY--ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE DOING A MASS SURVEY RATHER THAN A SAMPLING.

OTHER DISADVANTAGES ARE THAT AN IRATE CITIZEN MAY COLLECT QUESTIONNAIRES FROM NEIGHBORS AND ANSWER ALL OF THEM AND THE RESPONDENTS WILL NOT REPRESENT THE THINKING OF THE TOTAL POPULATION. FOR EXAMPLE, IT HAS BEEN FOUND THAT BETTER EDUCATED PEOPLE RESPOND TO A MAILED SURVEY MORE READILY THAN OTHERS.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE UNIQUE BENEFITS OF THIS TYPE OF SURVEY.

IN THE CASE OF SUCH A SURVEY OF ALL HOMEOWNERS AND RENTERS IN A DISTRICT, THE VERY ACT OF RECEIVING THE QUESTIONNAIRE WOULD IMPRESS MANY PEOPLE THAT THE BOARD AND EDUCATORS ARE OPEN TO OPINIONS AND IDEAS. EVEN THOUGH MANY WILL NOT TAKE THE TIME TO COMPLETE THE FORM, MOST PEOPLE WILL AT LEAST GLANCE AT IT AND START THINKING.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT AND ITS PROGRAM ARE LIKELY--AS A RESULT--
TO BE THE TOPIC OF DINNER CONVERSATION AND FAMILY DISCUSSIONS.

OTHER ADVANTAGES ARE THAT THE MAILED QUESTIONNAIRE MAY
REACH GROUPS PROTECTED FROM SOLICITORS AND INVESTIGATORS
AND RESPONDENTS MAY BE MORE CANDID.

(2) THE PRINTED QUESTIONNAIRE THAT IS DROPPED OFF AND
PICKED UP AT A LATER TIME HAS THREE MAIN ADVANTAGES.

- IT USUALLY YIELDS A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF RETURNS IN A
SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.
- THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A MISUNDERSTANDING TO BE
CLARIFIED.
- IT REQUIRES MINIMAL TRAINING OF PERSONNEL.

DISADVANTAGES ARE THE HIGH COSTS OF TRANSPORTATION AND
THE NEED FOR MANY RELIABLE WORKERS.

(3) THE THIRD TYPE OF SURVEY--THE TELEPHONE SURVEY--
IS THE LEAST EXPENSIVE OF THE FOUR. YOU SAVE THE COST OF
PRINTING A QUESTIONNAIRE. THERE ARE NO TRANSPORTATION COSTS
AND NO POSTAGE. ANOTHER MAJOR ADVANTAGE IS THAT IT CAN BE

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

COMPLETED IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AND REQUIRES A MINIMAL TRAINING OF PERSONNEL. CALLS MAY BE MADE AT DIFFERENT TIMES OF THE DAY, SO THAT WORKING FAMILIES ARE NOT EXCLUDED. AN ADDED ADVANTAGE IS THAT VOLUNTEER INTERVIEWERS MAY USE PREPARED NOTES AND AN INTRODUCTION--ONCE THEY BECOME FAMILIAR WITH READING THEM.

SOME DISADVANTAGES ARE: UNLISTED PHONE NUMBERS; SOME FAMILIES DO NOT HAVE PHONES; AND IT IS EASY FOR THE RESPONDENT TO HANG UP.

(4) THE LAST TYPE--THE PERSONAL INTERVIEW--HAS SEVERAL EXCELLENT ADVANTAGES.

- YOU GET A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF RETURNS.
- INFORMATION IS APT TO BE MORE CORRECT THAN THAT OF OTHER METHODS.
- ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED.
- RESPONDENT MISUNDERSTANDING CAN BE CLARIFIED.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

LIMITATIONS OF THE PERSONAL INTERVIEW INCLUDE:

- COST OF TRANSPORTATION.
- PERSONNEL MUST BE HIGHLY TRAINED.
- A GREAT AMOUNT OF TIME IS REQUIRED.

A WAY-PAVER FOR BOTH THE TELEPHONE AND PERSONAL INTERVIEW IS A LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT A FEW DAYS BEFORE EXPLAINING THAT THE PERSON HAS BEEN SELECTED TO BE INTERVIEWED AND THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY.

3. THE THIRD QUESTION TO BE ANSWERED IS HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD BE SURVEYED AND HOW SHOULD THEY BE SELECTED. THE ANSWER DEPENDS ON HOW PRECISELY YOU WANT TO FEEL THE PULSE OF YOUR COMMUNITY.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW THE COMMUNITY'S THINKING WITHIN FIVE PERCENT, YOU NEED A SAMPLE OF ONLY 384 PEOPLE. THIS MEANS THAT THE PROPERLY SELECTED 384 PEOPLE WILL REPRESENT THE THINKING OF THE COMMUNITY. IF 75 PERCENT OF THE 384 PEOPLE POLLED SAY THAT SCHOOL A INSTEAD OF SCHOOL B SHOULD BE CLOSED, YOU CAN FEEL COMFORTABLE THAT BETWEEN 70 PERCENT

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

AND 80 PERCENT (WITH YOUR PLUS OR MINUS 5 PERCENT FACTOR) OF THE COMMUNITY WOULD AGREE. THE 384 RULE APPLIES--WHETHER YOUR COMMUNITY HAS 4,000 OR 2 MILLION RESIDENTS. THE KEY IS CHOOSING THE SAMPLE IN A TRULY RANDOM FASHION SO THAT ALL OF THE COMMUNITY HAS THE SAME CHANCE TO BE CHOSEN.

GEORGE GALLUP BELIEVES HE CAN WORK WITH A TWO AND ONE-HALF PERCENT ERROR IN DETERMINING ATTITUDES ACCURATELY IN THE UNITED STATES. HE SURVEYS ONLY ABOUT 1,600 PEOPLE TO LEARN THE ATTITUDES OF THE ENTIRE NATION. BUT HIS SAMPLE IS VALID BECAUSE EVERY ADULT IN THE U.S. IS GIVEN AN EQUAL CHANCE OF BEING SELECTED.

IT'S BETTER TO GET A 90 PERCENT RESPONSE FROM A RANDOM SAMPLE OF 384 THAN TO GET A 50 PERCENT RESPONSE FROM 5,000. AND A MASS DISTRIBUTION, AS A RULE, ONLY NETS A RETURN OF 10 TO 25 PERCENT. IF YOU WANT TO PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE TO RESPOND, FINE. JUST BE SURE YOU USE ANOTHER SAMPLING TECHNIQUE TO ASSURE THAT DATA COLLECTED WILL BE USABLE AND DEFENDABLE.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

IF YOU WANT A GENERAL CITIZENRY REACTION, THE CITY PERSONAL TAX ROLLS, WHICH CONTAIN NAMES OF ALL ADULTS IN THE CITY, COULD BE USED TO SELECT EVERY 10TH OR 20TH OR 30TH NAME--DEPENDING ON THE SIZE OF THE COMMUNITY. OR, IF YOU WANTED REGISTERED VOTERS, THE VOTER REGISTRATION LIST COULD BE USED IN THE SAME WAY.

4. WHICH BRINGS US TO THE FOURTH MAJOR POINT. ONCE WE'VE DECIDED WHO TO ASK, WHAT...EXACTLY...ARE WE GOING TO ASK THEM?

- FIRST OF ALL, DON'T TRY TO DO TOO MUCH WITH A QUESTIONNAIRE. WHILE MOST PEOPLE HAVE OPINIONS AND ENJOY BEING ASKED WHAT THEY ARE, ENDLESS QUESTIONS CAN RESULT IN IRRITATION THAT CAN INFLUENCE RESPONSES IN A NEGATIVE FASHION.
- BRAINSTORM THE SUBJECTS WITH OTHER COLLEAGUES.
- ASK YOURSELF WHAT GOOD KNOWING THE ANSWER TO A PARTICULAR QUESTION WILL DO. IF NONE, THEN DON'T ASK THE QUESTION.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

- REMEMBER THAT THE PUBLIC HAS THE RIGHT TO KNOW THE RESULTS, SO DON'T ASK QUESTIONS YOU DON'T WANT THE PUBLIC TO KNOW THE ANSWERS TO.
- BE SURE THAT EACH QUESTION ONLY CONTAINS ONE QUESTION.
- MAKE SURE THE LANGUAGE IS SIMPLE, EASILY UNDERSTOOD AND WITHOUT EDUCATIONAL JARGON. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU ASK "WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL?" A LOT OF PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE DIFFERENT IMPRESSIONS OF THE MEANING OF YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL.
- AVOID LEADING QUESTIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU START A QUESTION WITH "IF IT WOULD MEAN A REDUCTION IN TAXES..." A LOT OF PEOPLE WOULD RESPOND POSITIVELY BECAUSE THEY WANT THEIR TAXES REDUCED--REGARDLESS OF THE MEANING OF THE REST OF THE SENTENCE.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

- MULTIPLE CHOICE AND/OR QUESTIONS WHICH MAY BE ANSWERED "YES" OR "NO" SHOULD BE USED FOR EASY TABULATION AND ACCURACY. HOWEVER, AT LEAST ONE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION AT THE END MAY GIVE YOU SOME VERY HELPFUL INFORMATION. FOR EXAMPLE, YOU MIGHT ASK: "HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT CAN BE IMPROVED?" OR "WHAT OTHER THOUGHTS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT YOUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS?"
- ASK YOUR MOST INTERESTING QUESTIONS FIRST. KEEP DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS, SUCH AS AGE, SEX, ETC., TO A MINIMUM AND PUT THEM AT THE END.
- PLACE QUESTIONS IN A SEQUENCE TO PROVIDE THE RESPONDENT WITH A LOGICAL THOUGHT PROCESS.
- TRY TO IDENTIFY CRITICAL ISSUES COMING UP AND BUILD THEM INTO THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

- CONDUCT PRETESTS TO ASSURE THE QUESTIONS ELICIT THE DESIRED INFORMATION AND ARE UNDERSTOOD. REVISE QUESTIONS WHICH PROVE TO BE CONFUSING OR AMBIGUOUS.

ONE OF THE GREATEST AIDS TO WORDING CLEAR QUESTIONS THAT GET DESIRED RESULTS IS A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION CALLED "THE QUESTION BANK." THIS IS A COMPUTER PRINTOUT OF PROPERLY WORDED QUESTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN USED SUCCESSFULLY IN ACTUAL SURVEYS. IT'S LISTED ON A HANDOUT I HAVE FOR YOU.

ANOTHER SUGGESTION FOR PREPARING A PRINTED QUESTIONNAIRE IS TO BE SURE TO LEAVE PLENTY OF WHITE SPACE. PEOPLE WILL RESPOND MORE READILY TO AN UNCLUTTERED THREE-PAGE QUESTIONNAIRE THAN THEY WILL TO A TWO-PAGER WITH TOO MUCH INK.

5. THE FIFTH AREA IS SELECTING AND PREPARING THE INTERVIEWERS IF YOU ELECT TO DO EITHER THE TELEPHONE OR FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

ONE POSSIBILITY IS TO PAY TEACHERS OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL SO MUCH AN HOUR TO INTERVIEW. OR MANY SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE GOTTEN EXCELLENT RESULTS WITH VOLUNTEERS. ONE DISTRICT USED MOTHERS WHO STAYED AT HOME WITH PRESCHOOL CHILDREN TO DO TELEPHONE SURVEYING. SENIOR CITIZENS, PTA MEMBERS, COLLEGE STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS ARE OTHER POSSIBILITIES. VOLUNTEERS, OF COURSE, KEEP THE COST DOWN AND GIVE PEOPLE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS. BUT WHETHER VOLUNTEERS OR PAID, TRAINING IS IMPORTANT.

WHILE EACH SURVEY SITUATION WOULD BE A LITTLE DIFFERENT, SOME GENERAL RULES APPLY.

- FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWERS SHOULD DRESS SIMILARLY TO THOSE THEY ARE INTERVIEWING.
- INTERVIEWERS SHOULD BE STRICTLY NEUTRAL IN THEIR APPROACH TO QUESTIONING TO AVOID INFLUENCING THE RESPONSE.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

- INTERVIEWERS SHOULD BE THOROUGHLY FAMILIAR WITH THE QUESTIONNAIRE, BUT SHOULD NOT MEMORIZE THE QUESTIONS.
- INTERVIEWERS SHOULD FOLLOW THE WORDING OF THE QUESTIONS EXACTLY.
- IN OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS, RESPONSES SHOULD BE RECORDED EXACTLY AS GIVEN.
- INTERVIEWERS SHOULD BE FRIENDLY AND SHOW A GENUINE INTEREST IN THE RESPONDENT WITHOUT APPEARING TO BE MEDDLING.
- INTERVIEWERS SHOULD PRACTICE INTERVIEWING DURING A TRAINING SESSION BEFORE DOING THE REAL INTERVIEWS.
- SPOT CHECKS SHOULD BE MADE WITH RESPONDENTS AFTERWARDS TO GUARANTEE THE ACCURACY OF RESPONSES.
- MEET WITH SURVEYORS IN A FINAL SESSION TO REVIEW THEIR EXPERIENCES AND SEEK THEIR SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SURVEYS.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

6. ONCE THE RESULTS ARE IN AND RESPONSES HAVE BEEN TABULATED, THEN WHAT?

SURVEY RESULTS ARE SHARED WITH ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF, THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, COMMUNITY LEADERS, SURVEYORS AND THOSE SURVEYED AND THE NEWS MEDIA THROUGH A PREPARED NEWS RELEASE AND PERHAPS A NEWS CONFERENCE. FINAL TALLYING OF RESPONSES IS BEST REPORTED IN PERCENTAGES: 47 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS ANSWERED "YES;" 39 PERCENT ANSWERED "NO," ETC. AND, OF COURSE, THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY, THE POPULATION SAMPLED, A COMPARIOSN WITH PREVIOUS SURVEYS AND NATIONAL SURVEYS, IMPLICATIONS OF RESPONSES, SIGNIFICANT TRENDS AND ANY OUTCOMES IN TERMS OF DIRECTION SHOULD BE INCLUDED.

7. OF COURSE, IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO SEND LETTERS OF THANKS TO INTERVIEWERS AND THOSE WHO RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY. BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT PART IS YET TO COME.

YOU'VE INVESTED A LOT OF TIME, EFFORT AND MONEY IN DOING A SURVEY, AND, IF YOU'VE DONE IT RIGHT, YOU'VE GOTTEN A WEALTH OF VERY VALUABLE INFORMTION THAT YOU COULDN'T HAVE OBTAINED

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

IN ANY OTHER WAY. JUST BE SURE IT DOESN'T BECOME JUST ANOTHER REPORT TO SET ON A SHELF AND GATHER DUST. IT HAS MANY DIFFERENT FACETS OF VALUE TO YOU AND YOUR DISTRICT. BE SURE YOU LOOK AT THE RESULTS FROM EVERY ANGLE.

FOR EXAMPLE, ANALYZE THE MESSAGE FROM SEVERAL DIFFERENT IDENTIFIABLE SEGMENTS. WHAT'S THE VIEWPOINT OF PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN ATTEND PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND WHAT DOES IT SAY FOR APPROACHES TO GETTING THEM BACK IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS? WHAT DO SENIOR CITIZENS THINK? HOW CAN YOU GET THEM MORE INVOLVED WITH THE SCHOOLS IF IT APPEARS THEY'RE UNINFORMED AND UNSUPPORTIVE?

INVOLVE A LOT OF PEOPLE IN INTERPRETING THE MESSAGES AND IN COMING UP WITH A PLAN OF ACTION. MAKE A COMMITMENT TO FOLLOWING THROUGH ON WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY SAYS.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

SPONSORS OF A POLL MUST BE PREPARED TO RECEIVE AT LEAST SOME "BAD" NEWS. AFTER ALL, A MAIN PURPOSE SHOULD BE TO IDENTIFY PROBLEMS IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. HOWEVER, PINPOINTING WEAKNESSES CAN BE CONVERTED INTO A POSITIVE PLAN OF ACTION TO OVERCOME THEM AND IMPROVE YOUR SCHOOLS.

IN CASE YOU DON'T REALLY HAVE THE STAFF OR TIME TO DO ALL THIS, YOU CAN ALWAYS HIRE A CONSULTANT. OBVIOUSLY THIS WOULD INCREASE YOUR COST SIGNIFICANTLY, BUT THERE ARE EXPERTS IN THE FIELD WHO CAN HELP YOU OUT. YOUR STATE AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS CAN PROVIDE THE NAMES OF FIRMS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO SPECIALIZE IN EDUCATIONAL SURVEYING.

ONE DEFINITE PLUS IN HIRING AN OUTSIDE CONSULTANT IS THAT IT TENDS TO OVERCOME CRITICISM THAT THE SURVEY WASN'T DONE PROFESSIONALLY.

Do You Know What Your Community Thinks?

IN THAT SAME VEIN, I MIGHT MENTION THAT A FEW YEARS AGO A SURVEY DONE ABOUT THE DALLAS SCHOOLS WAS SPONSORED BY THE NETWORK FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION--A GROUP COMPOSED OF TASK FORCES OF BUSINESS PEOPLE, THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY, HIGHER EDUCATION, SOCIAL SERVICE GROUPS AND OTHERS. IT WAS CONDUCTED BY AN OUTSIDE CONSULTANT. I BELIEVE IT HAD UNUSUALLY HIGH CREDIBILITY BECAUSE IT WAS NOT SPONSORED BY THE BOARD OF EDUCATION NOR THE ADMINISTRATION.

WELL, I MAY HAVE TOLD YOU MORE THAN YOU'LL EVER WANT TO KNOW OR WILL EVER USE ABOUT SURVEYING. BUT I HOPE I'VE CONVINCED YOU THAT IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT, THE TIME AND THE EXPENSE REQUIRED. I HAVE FOUND IT TO BE AN EXCELLENT TOOL IN MANAGEMENT THAT CAN BE PARTICULARLY HELPFUL IN PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

I WOULD LIKE TO CLOSE WITH A STORY BY THE FRENCH PHILOSOPHER VOLTAIRE ABOUT A YOUNG MAN NAMED ZADIG.

IT SEEMS THAT THE KING OF ZADIG'S COUNTRY WAS DISTRAUGHT. HIS FAVORITE HORSE WAS LOST. SEARCHERS HAD COMBED THE COUNTRYSIDE WITH NO TRACE OF THE HORSE. ZADIG ASKED PERMISSION TO LOOK FOR THE HORSE. THE KING WAS ASTOUNDED WHEN NOT LONG AFTERWARDS, ZADIG RETURNED WITH THE HORSE. THE KING ASKED: "HOW DID YOU FIND THE HORSE WHEN SO MANY OTHERS HAD FAILED?"

THE YOUTH REPLIED: "I ASKED MYSELF IF I WERE A HORSE, WHERE WOULD I GO? I WENT THERE, AND THERE WAS THE HORSE."

WELL, YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T LOST ANY HORSES LATELY, BUT I THINK THIS SAME PRINCIPLE CAN WORK IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL BUSINESS AS WELL. WE CAN CONSTRUCTIVELY USE THIS SAME APPROACH IN UNDERSTANDING VARIOUS VIEWPOINTS IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY BY PLACING OURSELVES IN THE SHOES OF ANOTHER PERSON, LEARNING WHAT THEY ARE THINKING AND SEEING THINGS THROUGH THEIR EYES. OPINION POLLS CAN HELP US DO THAT--TO KNOW WHAT OUR COMMUNITY THINKS AND EXPECTS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION.